bBr 97.10.32

Rough draft of letter sent by W. B. to Senator Morrill Nov. 22, 1896. Please return to W. B. (It was written at the cabin & got rained on coming up the river)

The deep interest which I take in the National Mus. impels me to write to you about the appointment, now pending, of an Assistant in Charge to succeed the late Dr. G. Brown Goode.

Under any conditions it would be essential, to secure the right kind of man for this important place but it is doubly so just now for the reason that the affairs of the Museum have not been wisely managed of late. If it has not actually run down it certainly has not made the progress which we have a clear right to expect of it. The fact itself is patent to any scientific man who has had at all intimate relations with the Museum during the past two years. The underlying causes are apparently; short sighted economy both with regard to the salaries of valuable assistants and the purchase of specimens; a lack of zeal (approaching apathy) for the general advancement of the museum; and a superfluity of red tape — in short — generally bad business management. The under Assistants in charge of the different departments are well enough as a class and several of them are as good men as could be found but they are grievously hampered by the red tape and discouraged by the lack of sympathy & interest on the part of their superiors.

Now the acting head of such an institution as the N. M. should be a naturalist who by virtue of natural abilities supplemented by education and experience has won & commands the respect and confidence of the whole scientific world and who in addition to this has executive ability of the highest order. He should further have strength & decision of character, reasonably sound health and a broad generous sympathy and interest in every one of the several department ~~of Natural Science~~ ~~with as in Botany~~

Such a man is hard to find in these days when practically all scientific work is done by specialists who, as the years go by, tend to narrow rather than broaden their chosen fields. Indeed the class of general naturalists has ~~become~~ well nigh, become extinct.

Fortunately, however, there is one survivor — not an old man, strong in all the essential qualities above enumerated, especially strong in executive ability, and of the very highest standing throughout the scientific world. I refer to Dr. C. Hart Merriam of Washington whose name you have doubtless heard mentioned in connection with this place and who, I understand, will accept it if it be offered to him on reasonable terms. If it be not offered to him the Regents will make a very grave mistake for he is not only the best man in this country who is at present available but he is the only man. An even worse mistake would be the appointment of Mr. True who, it is reported, is strongly desired by Prof. Langley.

I have known Mr. True for upwards of 15 years and he has invariably treated me so kindly and courteously that I find it very hard to say anything against his present interests but the simple facts are that his scientific work is not of the first order, his standing among scientific men is not high, and he has almost no executive capacity.

I will add that the views just expressed, ~~[illegible]~~ are in no sense peculiar to me but are held more or less strongly by practically ~~all~~ the naturalists of my acquaintance ~~[illegible]~~

Trusting that at one of the Regents [illegible] you will give them due consideration I remain

Dear Sir:

The deep interest which I take in the appointment concerning of an Assistant in Charge of the National [illegible] [illegible] complete [illegible] [illegible] to [illegible] on this subject. I have no wish to obtain [illegible] actively the management

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~~Hon~~. Brewster, Wm.

Nov. 22nd. 1896.

"Draft of letter to Denton